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ASCS Background Information

Agency
Organization

BI No. 1
December 1985

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Agricultural
Stabilization and
Conservation
Service

The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), an agency of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, administers farm commodity, conservation, environmental protection, and emergency programs.

These programs provide for commodity loans and price support payments to farmers; commodity purchases from farmers and processors; acreage reduction; cropland set-aside and other means of production adjustment; conservation cost-sharing, and emergency assistance.

Financing of ASCS commodity programs is through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), a government entity for which ASCS provides operating personnel.

ASCS programs and services are described in BI No. 2, Commodity Credit Corporation; No. 3, Production Adjustment/Price Support; No. 4, Emergency/Defense Activities; and No. 5, Conservation/ Environmental Protection.

ASCS maintains a headquarters office in Washington, D.C.; an office in each State, and in most counties; a Caribbean Area Office in Puerto Rico which also serves the Virgin Islands; a Commodity Office and a Management Office in Kansas City, Missouri; and an Aerial Photography Field Office in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Office of the
Administrator

The agency is headed by an Administrator, an Associate Administrator and four Deputy Administrators.

Offices reporting to the Office of the Administrator are:

The Audits and Dockets Staff, which directs and approves policy and dockets prepared for the Commodity Credit Corporation Board of Directors' consideration; and coordinates with the Office of Inspector General and the General Accounting Office in conducting audits, investigations, and surveys dealing with State and county offices;

The Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights Staff, which develops and operates programs in these areas; and provides data on ASCS employment and program participation, evaluates programs for their effect on minority groups, and handles discrimination complaints;

The Legislative Liaison Staff, which serves as the focal point within ASCS for legislative matters and acts as liaison with the Office of the Secretary and Congress regarding these concerns;

The Information Division, which develops and administers a comprehensive information service program including news releases, publications, reports, speeches, and radio and television materials; and handles Freedom of Information and Privacy Act inquiries.

State/County Operations

The Deputy Administrator, State and County Operations (DASCO) directs and administers activities for these divisions: Tobacco and Peanuts; Conservation and Environmental Protection; Cotton, Grain and Rice Price Support; Emergency Operations and Livestock Programs; and directs the activities of the five Area offices.

Offices under DASCO develop policies and regulations concerning farm price support, production adjustment, farm storage, natural disaster and defense-related emergencies, soil and water resource conservation, and related activities.

DASCO maintains liaison with other Federal and State agencies and groups with similar interests.

The five Area offices (located in Washington, D.C.) are links between ASCS State offices and DASCO. The State and Caribbean Area offices report to the designated Area office.

Under guidance of the ASC Committees, State and county operations are carried out by staffs of ASCS employees.

In each State office, a State Executive Director (SED), appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, supervises administrative and program specialists. Attached to the State office and reporting to the SED are District Directors, varying in number by State, who provide management oversight and liaison with the State office for the counties in their districts. State offices usually are located in the State capital. The Caribbean Area office, in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico, is headed by a director and six area managers.

Day-to-day county office operations are supervised by a County Executive Director (CED) who is employed by the ASC county committee. The CED hires the necessary employees to staff the office. There are no county offices or ASC county committees in Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.

Farmer Committees

State and county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASC) committees, made up of members who are actively engaged in farming, administer the programs and activities of ASCS and the field operations of CCC.

These committees were established under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935, as amended. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 mandated use of elected farmer committees for the first time. Local farmers were considered most capable of making decisions regarding the administration of farm programs in their county. To insure against partisan or organizational domination of the programs, provisions were made for the annual election of local committee members by farmers. The early State committees were appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, as they are today.

ASC State committees are composed of from three to five members. In each State, the Director of the Agricultural Extension Service is an ex officio member, and has the right to vote on committee decisions. The State committee has overall responsibility for the administration of farm programs and the efficient operation of county offices within the State.

ASC county committee members are elected by other farmers in the county. There are some 3,000 county committees, one for each "agricultural county" in the Nation. Some counties are divided into communities where farmers elect committees which in turn elect county committee members.

A county committee is made up of three regular members (each of whom serves a staggered 3-year term), and two alternate members (both usually elected each year). The County Agricultural Extension Director is a non-voting ex officio member of the committee.

To hold office as a county committee member, a person must be eligible to vote in the committee elections, must reside in the county, and must meet certain requirements to insure that political activity or conflict of interests is not involved in committee decisions or operations.

In general, those eligible to vote in the annual ASC committee elections are persons of legal voting age who have an interest in a farm as owner, tenant, or sharecropper, and who are eligible to participate in the programs administered by the committee.

Commodity Operations

The Deputy Administrator, Commodity Operations (DACO), administers activities in commodity operations, warehousing, and storage, and for the Kansas City Commodity Office (KCCO).

KCCO, located in Missouri, has responsibility for acquisition, handling, storage, processing, and disposal of bulk and processed commodities as required to carry out Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) program commitments. These activities are coordinated in Washington, D.C., under the guidance of the ASCS Administrator who is also Executive Vice President of CCC.

KCCO utilizes private storage facilities, and the services of domestic carriers, lending agencies, vendors, processors, and other commercial enterprises.

KCCO activities include sales of CCC-owned or controlled commodities for domestic or export use; donation of available commodities under foreign and domestic distribution programs; and transfers to other U.S. Government agencies.

In Washington, D.C., DACO's divisions (Commodity Operations, Dairy, and Warehouse) develop policies and regulations for the dairy program; for the storage, handling, and disposition of CCC-owned commodities; sales agreements for specified commodities; for negotiating and carrying out such agreements and for developing policy recommendations concerning export and domestic commodity donations programs.

Management

The Deputy Administrator, Management (DAM), formulates and administers policies and programs for Budget, Fiscal, Management Services, Personnel, and Information Resources Management Divisions; the Aerial Photography Field Office (APFO), and the Kansas City Management Office (KCMO). DAM provides administrative support activities for all ASCS offices.

Offices under DAM are responsible for the ASCS and CCC budgets, financial operations, property, space allocation, procurement, printing, communications, forms and records management, automated data processing activities, employment and employee relations, aerial photos, and management information systems.

KCMO, located in Missouri, is the national accounting office for ASCS programs and the various price support and loan programs implemented through CCC.

The office provides technical direction, application, and coordination of ADP systems relating to the use of computers to administer ASCS programs; reports on ASCS and CCC financial and program operations; evaluates accounting systems; provides personnel, records management, procurement contracting, and other services for the KCCO and State ASCS offices.

KCMO also serves as the operational contact point for ASCS State and county offices, Washington (D.C.) offices, and KCCO on accounting transactions, and with Federal Reserve banks and other agencies and offices.

APFO, located in Salt Lake City, Utah, coordinates aerial photographic work for USDA; provides aerial photography for ASCS; provides aerial photographic contracting for USDA, and provides reproductions for government agencies and the public; provides satellite imagery for USDA agencies; and represents ASCS in remote sensing activities.

Aerial photos are used by ASCS to check compliance with farm programs and conservation practices, and by other Federal, State, and local agencies to provide visual information for urban development, planning studies, tax assessment, pollution studies, drainage programs, boundary determinations, road locations, pipeline and powerline construction, watershed and reservoir planning, and other land development projects. APFO has aerial photographs which cover all of the Nation's major cropland areas amounting to 90 percent of the total land area of the United States.

Program
Planning and
Development

The Deputy Administrator, Program Planning and Development (DAPPD), directs and administers activities for the staffs concerned with economic analyses of major policies involved in program administration; and prepares regulatory impact statements analyzing the effects of program and administrative decisions on the economy, the budget, and on consumer interests.

DAPPD also develops and administers operating policies and procedures for the Commodity Analysis and the Program Analysis Divisions, and for appeals of ASCS program and administrative determinations, and oversees the agency's correspondence.